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THE IRIS



Virginia Van Buren, con
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For the

Flower Lovers of Richmond



In Eastern lands they talk in flowers,
And they tell in a garland their loves and
cares;
Each blossom that blooms in their garden
bowers
On its leaves a mystic language bears.

—*J. G. Percival.*

Selected and Arranged by
VIRGINIA VAN BUREN

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Iris

"I have a message for you."

"Yes, many a story of past hours
I read in these dear withered flowers."

—*Lowell.*

"A poem every flower is,
And every leaf a line,
And, with delicious memories,
They fill this heart of mine."

—*Lowell.*

"Love is the password that shall ope the
gate
Before which all ages stand and wait.
The key to Truth, the mystery of Life,
A bit of heaven—in a world of strife."

—*Solomon.*

"Tell thyself what I would say—
Thou knowest it, and I feel too much to
pray."

—*Dryden.*

Iris in Poetry

In the spring a livelier iris changes on the
burnished dove;

In the spring a young man's fancy lightly
turns to thoughts of love.

Tennyson, Locksley Hall.

Each beauteous flow'r,
Iris all hues, roses, and jessamine,
Rear'd high their flourish'd heads between,
and wrought.

Mosaic.

—Milton, Paradise Lost.

Iris there, with humid bow,
Waters the odorous banks that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purpled scarf can show.

—Milton.

Thou art the Iris, fair among the fairest,
Who, armed with golden rod
And winged with the celestial azure, bearest
The message of some God.

—Longfellow.

Iris

The Iris was yellow, the moon was pale,
In the air it was stiller than snow,
There was even light through the vale,
But a vaporous sheet
Clung about my feet,
And I dared no further go.
I had passed the pond, I could see the stile,
The path was plain for more than a mile,
Yet I dared no further go.

The iris-beds shone in my face, when, whist!
A noiseless music began to blow,
A music that moved through the mist,
That had not begun,
Would never be done—
With that music I must go;
And I found myself in the heart of the tune,
Wheeling around to the whirr of the moon,
With the sheets of the mist below.

In my hands how warm were the little
hands,
Strange, little hands that I did not know;
I did not think of the elvan bands,
Nor of anything
In that whirling ring—
Here a cock began to crow!
The little hands dropped that had clung so
tight,
And I saw again by the pale dawn light
The iris-heads in a row.

—*Michael Field.*

“Underneath the Bough.”

—*Michael Field.*

Thomas B. Mosher, Portland, Maine.

Iris in Mythology

The name iris was given the group of plants now adopted as Richmond's official flower, by the ancients on account of the hues of the flowers. The name in Greek means "rainbow," and Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, was the swift messenger of the gods to men, with the rainbow, which connects heaven and earth, as her path. Iris was the special messenger of Jupiter and Juno. She was the daughter of Thaumas and the Ocean nymph Electra. In the earlier traditions "she is represented as a youthful virgin, with wings of gold, who hurries with the swiftness of the wind from one end of the world to the other, into the depths of the sea and the underworld."

When Juno sent her to the palace of the King of Sleep to bid him send a vision to Halcyone to reveal the death of her husband, Iris is pictured putting on her robe of many colors and tingeing the sky with her bow as she faithfully set out with her sad message to the drowsy abode of Somnus.

When Neptune was aiding the Greeks and driving back the Trojans, Jupiter, who sat watching the battle from Olympus, sent her with a stern message to Neptune, ordering him instantly to quit the field.

When we read the records of the tender, encouraging, and daring messages delivered by the goddess of the rainbow, we

appreciate the feeling of the ancients in giving her name to the flower of gorgeous coloring which "has a sword for its leaf and a lily for its heart."

Doubtless the Latin tutor of Oliver Wendell Holmes' The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, who was debating the name for his daughter, recalled these characteristics when he came upon the lines,

*"Ergo Iris croceis per coelum roscida
pennis*

Mille trahens varios adverso Sole colores,
and exclaimed, 'Iris shall be her name!'

'The fleur-de-lys, which is the flower of chivalry, has a sword for its leaf and a lily for its heart.'—*Ruskin*.

Iris in History

The young Crusader, Louis VII., of France, adopted the Iris flower for the emblem of his house, about the middle of the twelfth century, when he was about to undertake the second crusade. Since it was Louis' flower, it was called Fleur-de-Louis, which soon became corrupted into Fleur-de Luce, and later into Fleur-de-lis, or lily flower.

"The number of Fleur-de-lis used in emblazoning the arms of France were reduced to three, in the reign of Charles VI., about the year 1381."

Napoleon, who wished to ignore every Louis who had sat on the throne, altogether discarded the fleur-de-lis as an emblem.

The flower used by the royal family of Louis was white. The large common blue iris of the gardens is probably the Illyrian iris of the ancients. "It is our far more regal looking, but truly democratic blossom jostling its flowers in the marshes that is indeed 'born in the purple.'"

Iris in Our Gardens

There are about one hundred and seventy species of the iris scattered throughout the North Temperate Zone, in Asia, Europe, and North America, with a few species in Northern Africa. There are about one hundred species with numberless garden varieties in America. With the exception of the African, the Indian, and the *Oncocyclus*, Irises are especially adapted by their hardiness to growth in our gardens. The flag irises are of easy culture and grow in any good free garden soil. The large common blue iris of central Europe is probably the Illyrian Iris of the ancients. The source of the violet-scented orris-root is a white or pale blue iris from the south of Europe. The commonly called Spanish and English Iris are both of Spanish origin.

Among the many varieties found in Richmond gardens are the following:

SPANISH IRISES

Time of planting: Early fall or spring.

Time of flowering: May and June.

Place: Spots inclining to moisture.

Flowers: Bright, distinct, charming.

These are probably of the easiest culture. They are seldom injured by the winter. The "Thunderbolt" is the strongest.

"ENGLISH" IRISES

Time of planting: Early fall.

Time of flowering: June and July.

Place: Drier than the Spanish.

Flowers: Wider in all their parts than the Spanish. Limited range of colors, white and purple. "Mt. Blanc," pure white, is probably the most satisfactory.

GERMAN IRISES

Time of planting: October and November.

Time of flowering: May and June.

Place: Cool, moist. Excellent border plants.

Flowers: Large, handsome, often stately, exhibiting beautiful variegation and shades of color (white, blue, yellow).

DWARF IRISES

Time of planting: October and November.

Time of flowering: April and May.

Place: Dry, sandy soil. Useful border plants.

Flowers: Various colored, blue, lilac, yellow, etc.

The plant seldom grows over nine inches high.

JAPANESE IRISES

Time of planting: October and November.

Time of flowering: June and July.

Place: Cool, moist.

Flowers: White through various shades of blue to deep purple, with the segments variegated with darker veins and streaks, or plain.

The plants attain a height of from two to three feet and bear several flower stems.

The Japanese Iris is comparatively modern, and is of a distinct type.

Compiler's Note

This attempt to popularize some meager information concerning Richmond's official flower is offered to the patriotic citizens of Richmond with the desire that it will increase your interest in the Iris and your love for flowers in general. Those wishing to make a more thorough study of the iris may be interested in the references that I have found helpful.

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